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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role that culture and language can play in American Indian education, as well as some challenges of incorporating culture in education. The movement toward incorporation of language and culture in school curricula emerges out of a tattered educational history. This history shows how the use of Native languages and cultures in school has fallen on a continuum from English-only instruction to language and culture used only to achieve an ultimate goal of assimilation. Since the federal government funds most reform efforts in Indian education, it also determines the purpose and judges the success of such efforts. In contrast to assimilationist models of education, a bicultural education model expects that both the community and school will decide the purpose of education. In moving toward authentic incorporation of Native languages and cultures through a bicultural model, Indian educators must address challenges involving the diversity of understandings of language and culture, the diversity of understandings of culturally appropriate education, and the diversity of experience and tribal affiliation. The first step in overcoming unequal positioning of Native languages and cultures is to identify the power structures determining the purpose of education. Native efforts to reform education require guidance from educational research that seeks to preserve Native languages and cultures and to create opportunities where Native people can succeed in education. A research agenda should consider theoretical models, historical research on Indian education, practical studies on classroom teaching and learning, and related research on other minority groups. (Contains 29 references.) (SV)

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Holding a Mirror to "Eyes Wide Shut": The Role of Native Cultures and Languages in the Education of American Indian students

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Introduction

During my childhood, my family entered each New Year with a Blessing Way ceremony in order to renew our vision for acquiring balance and clarity in the work we engaged in in our daily lives. In those ceremonies the medicine man -- informed by Navajo knowledge, history, economics, science, and philosophy -- would share all the truths of the world. He would philosophize beautifully in our Navajo language about issues our people face. The ceremony, filled with powerful stories and songs, created a space in which education and transmission of culture took place. Having had the experience of ceremonies in which adults, with their children, are fully engaged in the acquisition of history and development of new ways of thinking motivates me to express the power our Native cultures hold for us.

There are places other than schools where education occurs, and where Native people effectively and successfully incorporate Native culture and language. Ceremonies like the Blessing Way are prime examples of occasions where this kind of powerful learning occurs. Through these learning experiences, we can celebrate our families' and Nations' the great philosophers– philosophers who bear experiences and knowledge so that others learn from their strengths and limitations. Environments in which our Native languages and cultures are used to educate are the kinds of environments educators should strive to create in classrooms serving American Indian and Alaska Native students, and that parents and elders can provide in children's home learning.

Our ancestors' Native cultures and languages are quickly moving from the center of our existence to the periphery. In a time when Indigenous Nations are reclaiming history, identity, and culture, many Native people's eyes still remain shut to the dire need

to resist social, cultural, and political change imposed by the dominant society surrounding our tribal and cultural borders. Only by holding a mirror to our own beliefs, values, and actions will we begin to overcome the quest to render our Indigenous nations invisible. On a daily basis, educators participate in a socialization process that places bicultural people "within a hierarchical structure that is informed by values that benefit the dominant culture" (Darder, 1991, p. 5). Moreover, as Antonia Darder states, "this hierarchical socialization is then reinforced by the fact that success or failure in school is considered an individual responsibility. When bicultural students perform poorly, it is clearly considered the student's fault" (p. 6).

With attempts from the outside to eradicate Native culture and language, it is crucial to explore and highlight those ways in which we – within our own communities – effectively incorporate Native culture and language into education. Also, we as Native educators should not help to create and/or sustain socialization processes for bilingual and bicultural Native people that ultimately, as Darder says, serve the dominant language and culture. We must work to create educational processes and opportunities in which Native languages and cultures are at least equally, if not primarily, valued.

In this paper, I discuss the role culture and language can play in education, as well as some of the challenges of incorporating culture in education. I draw on the multiple ways in which Native language and culture can foster acquisition of knowledge both outside and inside formal schooling. Based on my own teaching, learning, and research, I also discuss ideas and challenges of conducting research around these issues. I end with questions for educators of Native students to consider further as we engage each other in critical dialogue about our roles in the preservation of Native language and culture, and

about the quest for equity and excellence in education for American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Movement to Incorporate Native Language and Culture in Curriculum

The movement toward incorporation of language and culture in school curricula emerges out of a tattered educational history. This history shows how the use of Native languages and cultures in the curriculum falls on a continuum from English-only instruction and policy to language and culture being used only as a means to achieve an ultimate goal of assimilation. All along this continuum, the goals dictated by the dominant society.

Indian education created by the federal government was based on an explicit policy of assimilation that reserved no room for Native languages and cultures in the learning and teaching process. For example, J. D. C. Atkins, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1885 to 1888, articulated his views and those of the government in this English-only policy:

> Please inform the authorities of this school that the English language only must be taught the Indian youth placed there for educational and industrial training at the expense of the Government. If Dakota or any other language is taught such children, they will be taken away and their support by the Government will be withdrawn from the school....It is also believed that teaching an Indian youth in his own barbarous dialect is a positive detriment to him. The first step to be taken toward civilization, toward teaching the Indians the mischief and folly of continuing their barbarous practices, is to teach them the English language. (Vogel, 1973, p. 199-203)

Such policies and practices clearly demonstrate how colonial authorities[1] viewed the role of Native culture and language in education; that is, Native language was considered a

[1] K.T. Lomawaima (1999), in her chapter "The Unnatural History of American Indian Education," in *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education*, uses the term "colonial authorities" in reference to institutions, governments, and individuals representative of colonial powers and conquest of North America. I use this term in this paper to be clear that, within a historical context, colonial powers such as

"positive detriment" to the Indian and therefore was excluded from schooling. Colonial authorities perceived acquisition of White culture and English as a necessary step in "civilizing" Native people.

Though these beliefs were stated almost two hundred years ago, we see evidence of similar sentiments today in immigrant education and the English Only movement (e.g., California Proposition 227). In his article "The colonialism of the English Only Movement," Donaldo Macedo powerfully positions the English Only movement as a political tactic of colonization. He writes, "First, and foremost, the present assault on bilingual education is fundamentally political. The denial of the political nature of the debate concerning bilingual education constitutes, in itself, a political action" (2000, p. 15). He poignantly continues,

> Many educators will object to the term "colonialism" to characterize the present attack on bilingual education by conservative as well as many liberal educators. Some liberals will go to great length to oppose my characterization of the attack on bilingual education as a form of colonialism, rationalizing that most educators who do not support bilingual education are just ignorant and need to be educated. This is tantamount to saying that racists do not really hate people of color; they just are ignorant. While one can argue that they are ignorant, one has to realize that ignorance is never innocent and is always shaped by a particular ideological predisposition. (p.16)

In our work in Indian education, educators of Natives students are engaged in a historical and constant battle – "an ethnic and cultural war" (Macedo, 2000, p.15) – against dominant ideology. This work of resistance began with Indian children many years ago in federal boarding schools, where many children undoubtedly resisted the dominant culture and ideology that was being passed on to them as education. This

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Spain, Great Britain, France, and later the U.S. government became the agents conceptualizing what

resistance, I have argued, was viewed by federal agents and educators as a failure of the dominant education to assimilate Indian children (Yazzie, 2000). In response to this failure, the federal government commissioned an independent group of researchers to investigate. In their published report, *The Problem of Indian Administration* (the Meriam Report), these researchers introduced a humanistic approach to schooling Indian children -- though the goal of this approach was still assimilation. One manifestation of this humanistic approach was the researchers' belief that it was most effective to adapt the curriculum to the ways individuals most readily learned. They reported the following:

> The uniform curriculum works badly because it does not permit the relating of teaching to the needs of the particular Indian children who are the first generation to attend school and who do not speak English as it does for those who are of the third generation of school children, who have been in contact with the whites, and speak English in the home. (Meriam, 1928, p. 13)

The Meriam researchers articulated a discrepancy between the curriculum and the needs of many Indian children. Approximately seventy years after the Meriam Report, disparities are still found between the curriculum and the needs of Native students. Educational scholars and historians continue to document the social, cultural, and political repercussions of an educational system driven by an explicit assimilation policy (Adams, 1995; Almeida, 1999; Child, 1998; Lipka, 1998; Lomawaima , 1994; Meriam, 1928). Throughout time the influence of the assimilation policy on learning and teaching has become elusive – a hidden curriculum in the education of American Indian children.

Educational research has clearly established that Native culture and language are essential in Native children's acquisition of knowledge (Lipka, Mohatt, & the Ciulistet

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education should accomplish. See Lomawaima's chapter and Adams (1995) for a fuller discussion.

Group, 1998; Skinner, 1999; Yazzie, 1999) and foster academic achievement (Dupuis & Walker, 1988; Hakes & others, 1980; McCarty, 1989; Mohatt & Sharp, 1998, p.62) However, traces of assimilationist policy can be found in current efforts to "reform" Indian education under the guise of culturally appropriate education and legislation (Almeida, 1999;Yazzie, 2000). For example, the Self-Determination Act, which was passed by Congress to provide for more Native voices in Indian policy and education, is looked to as a symbol of Native control over, among other things, education for Native students. However, Congress retains ultimate control over any changes or reforms proposed for American Indian education. Critics of the Self-Determination Act "had come to believe the U.S. government wanted to train a selected group of Native American educators who would see themselves and their Native nations through the eyes of the colonizer" (Almeida, 1999, p. 18). The contradiction here lies in the fact that the federal government, under the guise of providing Native people with "self-determination," has the power to give Native people control over their own education; consequently, the federal government still also reserves the power to limit Native control over education.

In terms of culturally appropriate education, the contradiction lies in who determines the purpose of education. Since formal schooling is the arena in which culturally appropriate education needs to take place, the ultimate purpose of that education tends to remain assimilation into dominant society. Further, major shifts in the history of Indian education are the result of investigations *initiated by the federal government*. The Meriam Report (1928), Kennedy Report (1969), the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (1974/5), and President Clinton's Executive Order 13096

(1998) are all reports supported by federal financial resources that were initiated because of a perceived failure to educate and assimilate Indian children as measured by criteria set by the dominant society. How "culturally appropriate" is an education designed to assimilate students into the culture of the dominant society?

The success of any educational reform effort, such as culturally appropriate curriculum being implemented in schools serving Indian children, often depends on federal funding allocated by Congress or other branches of government, such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) or the Office of Indian Education (OIE). In the end even curriculum is controlled – whether directly or indirectly – by agents of government, not by Native people or by their communities. When federal funding runs out, programs claiming to educate using culture and language in curriculum stop functioning. Why aren't American Indian tribes funding and supporting educational programs that are founded in, preserving, and promoting Native culture and language? Those who provide the money have the control; if tribes fund programs they retain control over the purpose, curriculum, and pedagogy of such programs.

Current Trends

Language in Education

Ample research points to the existence of linguistic and cultural discrimination in society and schools serving language minorities. Today, sentiments like those of Commissioner Atkins's in the late 1800s persist in areas where minority languages are targeted by abolitionist legislation in some U.S. states. I return to Macedo (2000), who argues that English Only legislation is evidence of the raging racism within the borders of our democratic society. He describes the educator as a "specter of an 'ethnic and cultural war' which constitutes a code phrase that engenders our society's licentiousness toward racism" (p. 15). Moreover, regarding Native American languages specifically, Scott Ellis Ferrin (1999) argues that current English Only referenda may violate Native rights outlined in the Native American Languages Act (NALA). America's history of cultural destruction repeats itself in the very workings of our coveted democratic society, from legislative acts to how standardized tests that are used to further separate "capable" individuals from those who are less so. The American educator stands by and even participates in this destruction in schools, in communities, and of Native students.

Generations of Native people did not learn their own Native language. Studies of the Indian boarding school experiences suggest that Native children were strongly discouraged or forbidden to use their Native language, hence as parents they did not teach the language to their own children (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Lomawaima, 1994; Yazzie, 1997). In a study of the experiences of three generations of Navajo women, I found a Navajo mother who was taught that speaking Navajo would not benefit her children's livelihood in mainstream society, and that being bilingual would only impede

her children's learning in school. Many Native, people and communities have similar stories of language loss and inevitable cultural destruction. For example, in his work with Yup'ik teachers and community, Jerry Lipka reported, "In 1974, 88% of all Yup'ik people were speakers and by 1995 48% were Yup'ik speakers" (1998, p. 20). Similar trends are found among other tribes (Skinner, 1999). How does this decline in Native speakers impact the cultural and language education of future generations? Lipka observes, "At the time that the number of Yup'ik teachers is increasing, the language is declining and the culture is undergoing rapid change" (1998, p. 20). What this means for incorporation of language and culture by Native teachers may not be all that promising. A decline in Native speakers limits the possibility for authentic cultural and language education.

The English-only ideology supports an educational and social context in which Native children are not taught their tribal languages in their homes. Families and communities hold a wide range of views on this language issue, and educators must consider this disparity of experiences and in order to fully and effectively implement understand the role of culture and language in schools.

Culture in Education

In society at large and within the education and school community, the question of whether or not culture should play a role in education is a complex and much debated issue. It is important to understand that the debate does not have just two obvious sides, a Native versus non-Native perspective; the issue of the role of culture and language is in fact a formidable debate among and within Indian nations and communities. There is not agreement even within Native communities on whether and how language and culture

should be a part of education. Such internal debates, I argue, are fueled and sustained by the dominant educational and social systems that encourage competition and the pursuit of personal economic gain. The competitive, economically driven systems found in schools and in work environments strongly encourage Native people to function as individuals, rather than as members of their group, society, and community.

Though the importance of Native culture and language in education is supported and well articulated, preservation of that culture is simultaneously in competition with the benefits of economic and social mobility in a capitalist society. If we are serious about the incorporation of language and culture in education, then we have to be serious about using culturally appropriate decision-making models in education. Too many decisions are being made on an individual level, which leads to further fragmentation.

Educational Approaches or Options Regarding the Role of Language and Culture

Educational research reveals several options for the incorporation of language and culture in education. Each option renders a role for language and culture, but the consequences of each approach supports a different purpose of education. Two approaches with the goal of assimilation are:

- **English-only** – English is used as the primary language of instruction and learning. Native language, an inherent aspect of culture, is not valued in schooling. The purpose of education in an English-only model is assimilation.

- **Language and culture as a tool and a means to further assimilate Native individuals** - This was recommended by Meriam researchers in the 1920s and in other educational studies, such as the 1969 Kennedy Report.

Another approach supports preservation of both language and culture and achievement in formal schooling:

- **Bicultural education** -- The purpose of education is decided by both the community and school (as described in the work of Antonia Darder, 1991, and Jerry Lipka, Mohatt, and the Ciulistet Group, 1998).

Challenges to Incorporate Language and Culture in Educational Strategies

Linda Skinner's (1999) work shows that Native communities are operating to different degrees within these culture and language models. In her article, "Teaching Through Traditions: Incorporating Languages and Culture into the Curricula," Skinner identifies varying levels of language retention, acquisition, and decline within Native communities. She cites the work of the Center for Applied Linguisitics, which defines five distinct stages of language use (1999, p. 114-116):

- **Flourishing language** - A flourishing language has speakers of all ages, is use in all communicative situations, adapts to the changing culture of the community, and people who speak the language are increasingly becoming more literate. In addition, as the population increases, so do the number of language speakers. "An example of flourishing language is Navajo, with well over 100,000 speakers, more than any other American Indian language north of Mexico" (Skinner, 1999, p. 114). An important distinction for flourishing language is that some speakers are monolingual.

- **Enduring language** - An enduring language group, like the flourishing language group, will have speakers of all ages, but "most or all are bilingual," and the language adapts to the change in culture (p.115). English is used in most interactions, and the number of people who speak the language remain constant over time. In other words, as the population increases there is no obvious decline or increase in the those who speak the language. Among those who speak an enduring language, there is little or no Native literacy. "An example of an enduring language is Hualapai" (p.115).

- **Declining language** - The most obvious characteristic is the decline in language speakers as population increases. "Shoshoni is a declining language. The Shoshoni Nation has approximately 7,000 members, but their language is now spoken by no more than 75 percent of the Shoshoni people..." (p. 115). A declining language can be identified by a larger number of older speakers than younger. Younger people will not

necessarily have full fluency of the language. English is the preferred language in many situations and "essentially illiterate in the [Native] language" (p. 115).

- **Obsolescent language** - "Perhaps 50 tribes have fewer than 10 speakers, all of them elderly. The language can only be heard when the elders get together" (p.115) In other words, the line drawn between speakers and non-speakers is based on age; the older generations are the last speakers of the language. Children are not taught the language, therefore, the as population increases, the number of speakers rapidly decline. English is the primary language in all situations and there is no literacy in the language. Unlike other languages, the obsolescent language does not adapt to change in culture. More than half of the Native languages still spoken north of Mexico are obsolescent" (p. 115).

- **Extinct language** - Language is no longer spoken. "An example of an extinct language is Chumash. Approximately 32 years ago, the last speaker died, although the language had not been used for many years before" (p. 116).

Such differences in language acquisition and/or non-acquisition set up cultures within cultures. Traditional Native culture is tied to the language in so many ways; with such variation in language fluency and use, what will happen to traditional Native culture? Potentially, within traditional communities, new cultures not based in traditional language use will emerge. For example, a large percentage of traditional Native people were relocated to cities around the country. These people, living away from their homelands, have created new ways of being Native – a new Native culture. In some instances, these Native groups and individuals have retained language, but the purpose of language has changed from being the primary mode of communication to a secondary and infrequent mode of interaction.

In order to move toward authentic incorporation of Native languages and cultures as in the bicultural model described above, Indian educators need to address several challenges in a variety of diverse educational and Native environments.

The challenges are:

- a diversity of understandings of language and culture
- a diversity of understandings of what culturally appropriate education is
- a diversity of experience and tribal affiliation

These challenges provide opportunities for researchers and educators to investigate the complexities of authentically incorporating culture and language into education.

Diversity of Understandings of Language and Culture

One big challenge is that there is not clear agreement on what is meant by language and culture. Language can be understood as merely knowing and speaking words, or it can signify a whole range of verbal and non-verbal communication. Similarly, culture can mean anything from a series of rituals or symbolic representations to the ways of life and history of a particular tribe. Language and culture are not limited to the tangible characteristics detected by our senses but extend to the many ways in which groups and individuals understand and define what is considered language (verbal and non-verbal communication) and what is considered culture (ways of doing things, behavior patterns, attitudes, material goods).

The challenge is not that the concepts of culture and language mean different things, but that when we talk about them or attempt to implement such concepts and themes into educational instruction each group may each be focusing on different aspects of culture and language. Therefore, we might agree that it is important to incorporate language and culture in education, but we would have a much harder time agreeing on what aspects to focus on, what the concepts mean, and how to implement them in instruction. It is important then to be clear on how we, in our Native communities,

understand and demonstrate culture and language and what we consider culturally appropriate education.

My own experiences influence my thinking about these issues. For example, I represent various levels of language and cultural acquisition common among our many Nations. I am Navajo, born and raised on the Navajo reservation. My maternal grandparents both speak only Navajo, and my paternal grandmother speaks both Navajo and English. My parents are bilingual. While I was growing up, my parents fostered my sense of community by their participation in community events and activities (chapter house celebrations, family ceremonies, and school events). I do not speak the Navajo language fluently; however, through cultural interactions I gained a knowledge of Navajo culture and values. Regardless of language fluency, there is a sense of culture, values, attitudes, and morals that are enduring and present as aspects of my cultural self. I believe that people can be culturally Native and yet not speak their Native language, as is evident in non-Native speaking Indian populations found in urban centers *and* on reservations.

With regard to language, my grandmother said it best: "You may not speak Navajo, and may not speak English, but you still speak two languages, yours and mine." She was talking about speaking a cultural language of respect and values demonstrated by non-verbal communication.

Unfortunately, not all believe as my grandmother does. My honesty about not speaking Navajo places me in a position in which I am critically and deeply scrutinized, both by Native and non-Native people; this scrutiny is often delivered in ways that I would not expect from those who speak Navajo. In other words, those who speak Navajo

who are critical of me do not demonstrate the very cultural values embedded in our culture, such as patience, honor, respect, and beauty. My own people's words are harsh, judgmental, and even insensitive: *"You are not really Navajo." "What's the matter with you? You think you are too good for us?"* Though I see this criticism as oppressing and destroying possibility among our own people I have had to force myself to view such comments in a different light. Surely the frustration of language loss is felt by both Native speakers and non-Native speakers, just as cultural loss is felt and dealt with differently by both parties. Interestingly, though, these divisive and judgmental comments essentially demonstrate, if in a rather twisted way, a passionate advocacy for language and cultural preservation. Ultimately, language cannot be just a "speak it or don't speak it" issue; it's also about ways of communicating and understanding the culture that the language represents.

How we understand the concept of culture has challenges similar to those regarding language. Culture is an elusive concept, and among Native people we find various ways of articulating aspects of culture. Regarding the multiple ways to understand the concept of culture, Daniel Yon (2000) states,

> Far from being a stable and knowable set of attributes, culture has now become a matter of debate about representations and the complex relationships that individuals take up in relation to them. (p. 9)

In his review of theory defining culture, Yon found varying theories that articulate the lack of consensus around the definition. Some theorists and people have accepted culture to be purely representations of a group. Art, music, and written texts, for example, are considered representations or products of culture. Others might consider culture to be the way people interact with each other and the world around them. Values

such as honor, respect, patience, and sense of belonging to family or community are other aspects of culture.

The dilemma emerges as a question: If, as Lipka suggests, there is a simultaneous decline in Native speakers and an increase in Native teachers, which aspects of culture and language can be taught in schools where children and teachers do not speak the Native language? There are various definitions of culture and aspects of language operating that make teaching in culturally appropriate ways difficult.

Diversity of Understandings About Culturally Appropriate Curriculum

Depending on the aspect of culture valued by any given tribe, teacher, or parent understandings of language and culture differ, therefore, how educators create and implement culturally appropriate curricula may also differ. Ultimately, in classroom teaching, the teacher makes decisions regarding what is taught and how it is taught. In the case of using culturally appropriate curriculum, both content (what is taught) and pedagogy (how it is taught) will be decided by the teacher. All too often teachers simply promote Native stories and dress as aspects of Native culture over more in-depth knowledge inherent in our respective Native cultures. For example, at the most basic level, if teachers of Native students do not speak the Native language of a particular community, how they incorporate cultural knowledge may be limited to visible indicators of culture like, holidays, food, and heroes.

Culturally appropriate curriculum requires that educators implement culturally appropriate ways of teaching and learning throughout the entire day. This means that language is not taught only one hour a day, but it is taught and used throughout the entire

school day. And it also means that aspects of cultural knowledge, such as, Native history, science, philosophy, are all incorporated into what is taught in schools.

In order to understand, create, and implement culturally appropriate curriculum teachers need to be "educated" to do so. Teacher education programs and courses that model this kind of teaching are needed to train teachers to understand, develop, and implement culturally appropriate curriculum in schools serving Native students. In this way, both Native and non-Native teachers can be trained to develop and implement culturally appropriate curriculum in classrooms serving Native students. If we are serious about truly working to incorporate culture and language into the schooling process, then we as, educators, parents, and community, need to envision a different kind of education that incorporates culturally appropriate ways of thinking and behaving. In other words, in Navajo classrooms, it's not just about incorporating familiar cultural icons, such as counting sheep, into math questions, but rather teaching math in ways that are aligned with cultural knowledge and language. Educational research that documents all the different ways teachers understand, create, and implement culturally appropriate curriculum is needed. In addition, since schools do not exist in a vacuum, parents and community members need to be interviewed about their understandings of what is culturally appropriate teaching and learning. Schools and communities need to come together to design, implement, and support such programs.

Diversity of Experience and Tribal Affiliation

Diversity among our tribes is our greatest strength and also our greatest challenge. As Native people, we have many languages and cultures both among tribes and within tribes. As Native people occupying both reservations and urban centers, we have

different understanding and knowledge built out of our experiences – our experiences that simultaneously span three or four generations.

Indian Nations and non-Natives can no longer assume homogeneity – difference exists among Native people and communities, and sometimes divides us as we attempt to transform our social and cultural realities under the guise of self-determination. Our behaviors are profoundly influenced by our socialization in a capitalistic, individualistic, power-hungry society. Our social, cultural, moral, and political boundaries are extremely fuzzy, and often engage us in battles regarding identity. When we wage identity wars among ourselves, we further perpetuate dominant ways of thinking. For example, language is more than just speaking, more than words, sentences, and phrases. If one speaks the language but does not combine it with culturally appropriate behavior and values, one is simply speaking words and not illuminating culture. Preservation of language and culture requires clarity about what elements of culture and language we are talking about. There are notably different articulations of language and culture and the role they both can play in educating members of Native societies; identifying them will help educators develop educational strategies that promote bicultural benefits, such as self-determination.

Overcoming the Various Challenges

Indian education in the sense of formal schooling is about power and control (Lomawaima, 2000). The first step in overcoming unequal positioning of our languages and cultures is to identify the power structures determining the purpose of education. Native people can do this by examining our own histories, defining our understandings of concepts like education, culture, and self-determination. Current research offers insights

to dealing with the multiple challenges articulated in this paper. Native efforts to reform education by increasing the incorporation of language and culture require guidance from educational research that is purposeful both in preserving Native language and culture, and in creating opportunities where Native people can enjoy success in educational attainment. In this way we can define our own purpose for education acquired in schools serving our communities.

The work of Jerry Lipka and the Ciulisetet group (1998) in Alaska is just one example of exemplary research focused on culture in the field of education. These researchers, who are both members of Alaskan Native communities and university researchers, document their efforts and struggles in a book entitled *Transforming the Culture of Schools*. The authors describe their process:

> This inquiry began as a slow process of reconciling cultural conflict, resulting in negotiation and adaptation. The process is not magical and these narratives are not Pollyana-ish. The teachers' experiences contained risk, and in fact, some of the teachers are casualties of these conflicts....The process of cultural conflict and cultural adaptation that they experienced and described in this book begins to reverse the historical processes of education as colonization....and to slowly replace it with a process of democratization by which underrepresented minorities' access to the profession is increased, and their culture is included in the processes and content of schooling. (pp. 4-5)

In this work, Lipka and colleagues, soften the tension between Native and school cultures by speaking about culture in a unifying manner; that is, by focusing on the meeting of cultures in a shared space called "school and community," he begins to break down the inherent barriers stemming from external understandings of Native culture, thus placing it at the center of school culture. Viewing schools as shared spaces of knowledge transmission reverses the paradigm of outsider-insider. Teacher, community, and learner

exist in a shared space very much like that of the Blessing Way ceremony described in my story at the beginning of this paper.

As mentioned earlier, incorporating language and culture in schools serving Indian children requires a change in how we think of the purpose of education. Changing how educators, administrators and teachers, community, and students operate within school structure is very tricky, and often causes tension among the constituencies. Lipka and fellow researchers observe:

> Deep rifts, which had always existed, became apparent in the discussions [regarding development of the Yup 'ik language immersion program], such as, 'How can our children learn English through Yup 'ik?; Yup 'ik is only a community responsibility and should be taught in the home, not the school; What will happen to our non-Native teachers if we teach in Yup 'ik?

The questions posed by members of the Yup 'ik community are similar as concerns raised in many other Native communities. Carefully, Lipka and his colleagues worked with community to create an educational approach that supported the preservation of language and supported the needs of students. A Native teacher and member of research team, Nancy Sharp, found that in using Yup 'ik culture and language her students showed academic achievement as measured by the Stanford Early Achievement Test (Mohatt & Sharp, 1998, p. 62).

It is important to reiterate that *how* teachers are prepared to teach in Native communities is essential for successful development and implementation of culturally appropriate curriculum in schools serving Native students. For example, teachers teach in culturally appropriate ways use both language and behavior to emulate culture. In

other words, how the teacher organizes his or her classroom is just as important as how he or she teaches history.

Perspectives That Inform Our Educational Strategies and Research

While the study of culture and language is already extensive, there are some perspectives to consider further in a research agenda focused on the role of language and culture in educational strategies; they are as follows:

- **Theoretical Models**- Linguistics, anthropology, sociology, cultural psychology, philosophy, law, and recent work with critical theory.
- **Historical Research**- Boarding School studies inform what happened in schools at the turn of the century and reveal the purpose of education in those schools. For example, Lomawaima's *They Call It Prairie Light* unveils the theories guiding the education that socialized our parents and grandparents. Studies focused on archival material and government documents, such as Brenda Child's *Boarding School Seasons,* provide artifacts for study by children and adults. Through oral histories, Indian communities need to document in their own ways the knowledge of our elders so as to develop better understandings of our respective cultures.
- **Practical** - Studies that look at classroom learning and teaching, like *Collected Wisdom* (1998) and *Transforming the Culture of Schools* (1998), demonstrate possibility and the power of teaching in innovative ways. In addition, such studies can provide ways of thinking "outside the box" with regard to how education is structured, and what education is meant to do for Native people.
- **Research Emerging from Other Minorities** – An exploration of related research on groups with cultural differences: immigrant education, Afro-American and Latino academic achievement, bilingual education, multicultural education, teacher efficacy, and identity research is helpful.

Conclusions: A Vision for the Role of Language and Culture in Education

My vision of the role of culture and language in education has emerged out of my life experience, education, and research. This vision challenges all that Native educators have been socialized to think and how we behave. I know now, from my location as a

doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, that had I learned from Navajo teachers, historians, scientists, and philosophers in the language of our people I would be better prepared to think and challenge the Western canon in diverse ways with academic rigor. Out of this critical look at my own education, I have developed a vision for Indian education that guides and motivates me in my work as a Navajo educator and researcher:

> Through Native culture and language we must engage ourselves and non-Natives at the highest level of debate and acquisition of knowledge for the purpose of gaining clarity and growth in our minds and bodies. Strong, clear thinking and action will further develop our great Nations from which we come. Native culture and language that exemplifies respect, humility, beauty, patience, and honor should be a curriculum for living throughout all the stages of our lives.

This vision dispels the myths that wrongly plagued our parents and influenced many of them to turn away from passing on our Native languages. My vision stems from teachings of my parents, grandparents, and elders, and it embodies possibility, hope, and patience for change to occur in the many societies in which Native people live.

Too often we narrowly speak of education as the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student in formal schooling. Schools are certainly one of many spaces in which learning takes place, but they constitute only one such space. I used the specific example of the Blessing Way ceremony to describe a learning process in which Navajo culture and language are at the center of transmission of knowledge – in other words, education.

Native educators, leaders, and community members have in their hands an opportunity to define education and articulate a research agenda that addresses

educational challenges and reflects the needs of our respective communities. Native language and culture can be central in this effort.

Some key points that inform my vision for culturally appropriate education may also be helpful for other educators to consider in their own work:

- First, examine and understand the historical role culture and language played in the assimilationist education of American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- Second, examine the educational, social, political, and cultural challenges with which Native educators contend - e.g., defining culture and addressing language issues.
- Third, through imagination and innovation discover the possibilities of overcoming cultural domination.
- Fourth, explore existing educational strategies that effectively incorporate culture and language in educational settings and spaces.
- Fifth, develop a research agenda *with* Native community members that further describes, implements, and critically evaluates the role of culture and language in Native education.

Finally, continue to develop and discuss the emerging role educators and researchers play in facilitating a movement from theory to action.

Native adults and some educators have responded to language loss by arguing that cultural and language preservation "has to be an individual choice." In this instance decisions are made by the individual, leaving little room for members of the group to engage in communal decision-making. History reveals a parallel (and destructive) construction of individual versus group decision-making. The federal government, via the Dawes Allottment Act of 1887, forced Native people to individually own land, rather than care for it as a group, a tribe, a nation. By coercing individuals to make land decisions on their own, the government successfully destroyed community decision-

making processes. Likewise, if culture and language advocates continue to argue only for language preservation on an individual level rather than on a tribal and national level, culturally appropriate education will only exist in fragmented ways and will never be a reality for all Native people. Young people will continue to fall through the cracks and will be further disconnected from their languages and cultures. In addition, we would create divided nations where the line is determined by the ability to speak our Native languages of our respective tribes. Essentially, we create in our own societies *the haves* and *the have-nots*. In this day and age, with enormous pressures from both outside and inside our communities to assimilate, we can no longer afford – from either a cultural or an educational standpoint – this kind of internal fragmentation. Educators and researchers need to find ways in which proficient and non-proficient Native speakers can learn under equitable circumstances.

My study of history reveals that the decisions we make today are profoundly impacted by precedence and past generations. I am not the only one to come to this conclusion; many other people in their own way have come to know this very well. When we simply make the argument that language and culture preservation "has to be an individual choice," we ignore our communal roots. Our tribes and nations should commit to the preservation of our languages and cultures – not only of individuals. Preservation of language requires creating conditions where language is spoken and valued by groups, by tribes, and by non-Natives. Just as families once shared growth and knowledge-building through ceremonies connecting us to our external relations, tribal groups may find it necessary to collaborate with other Indigenous nations in the effort to preserve our diverse ways of knowing and living. As stated earlier, language and culture

only assist us in exceeding our expectations to develop fuller and more productive social and cultural systems.

The choices we make for the continued preservation of our varying languages and cultures are not simple. Each choice is complex and deeply embedded in decades of language and culture oppression. Individuals may choose to teach their Native language to their children, yet they are doing this in a context in which those teachings are not encouraged. In other words, it is like trying to swim upstream, struggling against a strong current, pulling you down, pushing you up, taking your ability to breathe freely.

Ethnocentric philosophies, beliefs, and actions carried out in formal schooling resulted in the forced destruction of Native languages for many generations. Language and culture loss can also be found among other language minorities. While other language minority groups' situations vary greatly from those of our ancestors, the children of the next generation will face insurmountable loss. Indian education can surely benefit from research that focuses on the challenges articulated in this paper. Luckily, our task in research can count on the many young Native scholars who understand loss at a deep level, and the inherent importance of revitalizing and preserving Native culture and language.

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